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THE Unexplained

MYSTERIES OF MIND SPACE & TIME

137

Ummo: true or false?
St Joan: child of God?
Miracles of St Medard
Pursued by a poltergeist
Salem: the madness begins

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THE Unexplained
MYSTERIES OF MIND SPACE & TIME

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Contents

Joan of Arc
DAUGHTER OF GOD? 2721
We examine the early life of this extraordinary soldier-saint who believed herself to be God's own daughter
Graham Fuller and Ian Knight

Classic poltergeists
FLIGHT FROM FEAR 2726
Paranormal violence finally drives Carla and Thierry from their home – but has the poltergeist gone away?
Elmar Gruber and Susan Fassberg

Salem witches
SALEM: THAT WAY MADNESS LIES 2729
When bored teenagers took up fortune telling all hell broke loose in the Puritan community of Salem
Frank Smyth

St Médard
THE HORRORS OF HEALING 2734
Some miraculous cures can themselves be horrific; those in the graveyard of St Médard were especially grisly
Colin Wilson

Ummo
UMMO – RED ALERT 2738
Does the allegedly 'perfect UFO case' of Ummo really bear close scrutiny? Was it merely a bizarre hoax?
Hilary Evans

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Daughter of God?

Joan of Arc's mysterious 'voices' impelled her inexorably towards her amazing military triumphs – and a martyr's death. GRAHAM FULLER and IAN KNIGHT investigate the enigma of Joan's visions and her brief, dazzling career

JOAN OF ARC was 19 years old when she was burnt at the stake on 30 May 1431. The short life of 'La Pucelle de Dieu' ('the Virgin of God') – she was also known as the Maid of Orléans – is one of the most extraordinary and inspirational in history. Nearly 500 years after her execution her martyrdom was formally recognised as such when she was canonised in 1920, thus fulfilling Shakespeare's prophecy in *Henry VI Part I:*

> No longer on Saint Dennis will we cry
> But Joan la Pucelle shall be France's saint.

Her entry into the canon of saints marked the culmination of Joan's gradual reinstatement during the 19th century as a great national heroine; especially from 1870, when France was humiliatingly occupied by the Prussians, she was seen as a symbol of self-sacrificing patriotism, as she was to be again during the two World Wars.

The more bizarre, paranormal, aspects of her life were eventually, in modern times, to be seen as evidence of her sanctity; in the superstitious, Church-dominated 15th century they brought her to trial on charges of witchcraft and heresy. But even without the mysteries and alleged sorcery (such as the story of her escape from the flames) her glittering, Christ-like progress from teenage peasant girl to saint is remarkable enough in itself. As W.S. Scott wrote in his biography of her:

> the inexplicable in her history is not by any means the most important. Without any trace of the miraculous she would still be one of the greatest figures of history, one of the noblest characters.

Yet, as Joan's 15th century contemporaries were well aware, her experiences and activities did lend themselves to a sinister interpretation.

Joan was born in the village of Domrémy in Lorraine, in France, probably in the year

Joan of Arc was born and grew up in the village of Domrémy (below, from a 19th-century painting) in Lorraine. She was apparently a dutiful daughter and shared her mother's work, sometimes spinning thread late into the night. Inset: a 19th-century statue of Joan spinning with a distaff

1412. One of five children (she had three brothers, and a sister who died while still a young woman), the future scourge of the English seems to have had a sheltered childhood. Her father Jacques Tarc (her familiar aristocratic-sounding name d'Arc is a 16th-century poet's corruption) was keeper of the local cattle pound, and Joan may occasionally have led the cattle out to pasture. Her mother, Isabelle, taught her her prayers and how to sew. She seems to have left Domrémy only once or twice, when her parents sent her away for fear of the bands of mercenaries and Burgundian soldiers then marauding the countryside, pillaging, burning, raping and killing.

At the time of Joan's birth, France was undergoing one of the great crises of its history. It was in the grip of the Hundred Years War, a war of succession resulting from Philip of Valois succeeding to the French throne in 1328 in preference to England's Edward III. In the mid 1420s the protagonists were the French Dauphin Charles, heir of the mad Charles VI who had died in 1422, and the boy king Henry VI of England, whose regent the Duke of Bedford was entrenched in the north of France with his victorious English armies and his Burgundian allies. Although he was technically Charles VII (since his father was dead) the Dauphin could not be crowned and consecrated in Reims Cathedral because it was in enemy hands. Charles's problems were greatly compounded by years of tragic and bloody in-fighting. The Dauphin needed a champion, and France a saviour.

It was probably in 1425 that Joan first heard the voices that were to lead her to her country's rescue. This is how she described her first visitation (taken from the third-person report of her trial):

> When she was 13 years of age, she had a voice from God to help her to know what to do. And on the first occasion she was much afraid. And this voice came about the hour of midday, in the summertime, in her father's garden. . . . She heard the voice upon the right side, towards the church, and she rarely heard it without an accompanying brightness. . . .

After she had heard the voice three times, she said, she understood that it was the voice of an angel.

It was the voice of St Michael the Archangel. From the very beginning, it held Joan under its sway, and elicited from her a vow of chastity.

St Michael not only spoke to Joan but appeared to her, and so did St Catherine of Alexandria and St Margaret of Antioch. Asked at her trial whether St Michael had hair, Joan replied somewhat tartly, 'Why should it have been cut off?' The two female saints appeared usually as crowned heads; she could remember their faces, she said, but not their corporeal bodies or their clothes. Yet she had embraced them in supplication and savoured their sweet scent. These apparitions filled her with emotion: 'I saw them with the eyes of my body, as plainly as I see you; and when they left me, I wept, and longed for them to take me away with them.'

In fact they were to be her constant companions throughout the rest of her short life, and she could summon them at will: 'Often they came without being called, and at other times, if they did not come, she would ask God to send them . . . she had never had need of them and not had them.'

At first St Michael merely told her 'to be a good girl and God would help her'. But before long the bewildered girl was being told that 'she would come to the aid of the King of France.' Then, two or three times a week, she was told that 'she should go into France.' She could no longer remain where she was, the voice said; 'she would cause the siege laid before Orléans to be raised.' More precisely, the voice told Joan that she 'should go to the fortress town of Vaucouleurs, to

Above: a 17th-century engraving of Joan and the Dauphin entering the city of Reims. Charles was crowned and consecrated in Reims Cathedral (top) on Sunday, 17 July 1429. The ceremony lasted from 9 a.m. until 2 p.m., and Joan stood beside Charles throughout, dressed in a green tunic and a rich mantle of red and gold, holding her battle standard in her hand. After the exhausting cathedral ceremony a coronation banquet was held in the archbishop's palace, and the newly anointed king then rode in procession round the city, wearing his crown and robes, to show himself to the crowds that had flocked to see his coronation. Joan accompanied the king, and the people thronged around her and tried to touch her in her glory

find Robert de Baudricourt, captain of that place, and that he would give her people who would go with her'. To all this Joan replied that she was a poor girl 'and did not know how to ride a horse or to make war'.

But eventually she could withstand these commands no longer. She went to Vaucouleurs and, although Baudricourt refused at first to have anything to do with her, she persuaded him at last to send her to the Dauphin at Chinon, where she had her first audience with him sometime during February 1429. She adopted male attire, became a knight of France, a skilled horsewoman and an inspiring war leader; and she raised the siege of Orléans on 8 May the same year. Throughout this meteoric career, her voices continued to counsel her.

From heaven or hell?

What was the source of Joan's visions? Joan herself was certain that they were of divine origin. Her strongly held belief is described by John Holland Smith in his *Joan of Arc* (1973):

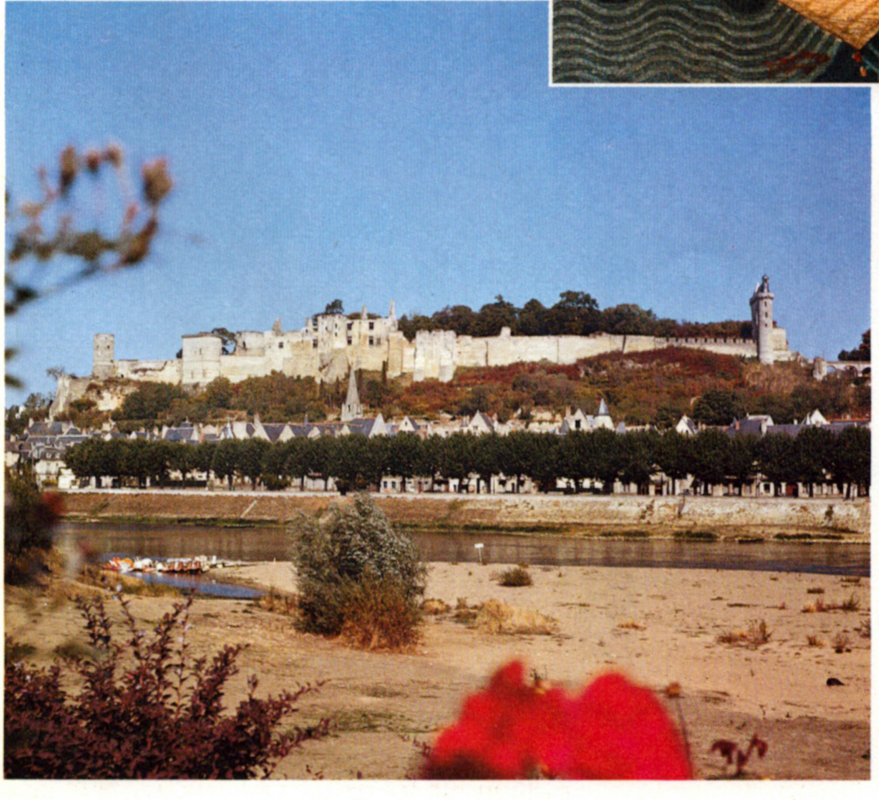
> Throughout her life, Joan was convinced that her voices came from God. Though no one else could hear them, they proved that she was 'the Virgin from God' or as they themselves called her after Orléans 'the Daughter of God'. . . . Step by step, the voices convinced Joan . . . that she was not just another daughter of Eve and therefore of God, but *the* Daughter of God, *the* Virgin from God, *La* Pucelle.

Before her voices could drive Joan out of her parents' house into the world, they had to build up her self-confidence until she felt strong enough in herself to face the difficulties that awaited her. 'They had first to make her believe in them and trust them implicitly, and then make her believe in and trust herself.'

Joan's conviction that she was God's daughter was not confined to herself. Even after her cause was lost, and she had recanted, relapsed, and been executed, her executioner and at least one of her judges expressed fear of retribution for the part they had played in her death.

The theory that Joan's visions were divine manifestations, with Joan as 'the God-appointed means of rescuing the kingdom of France from its difficulties', is attractive to the religious mind, and is favoured by the patriotic Roman Catholic Church in France.

Before Joan could lead the Dauphin's armies to victory, she had to convince him that her mission was divine. She set out from Vaucouleurs in February 1429 and, with only four knights and two servants as escort, rode nearly 300 miles [480 kilometres] across France to Chinon in 11 days. A German tapestry picture from the early 15th century (below) shows Joan arriving at Chinon castle (bottom), where the 26-year-old Dauphin and his court were in residence



Another theory is that even though Joan's experiences may be rationally explained her life and actions may have been pre-ordained, by divine, paranormal or some other determinist means. Certainly there seems to have been an extraordinary inevitability about Joan's success during her short, dazzling military career.

Her first audience with the Dauphin took place some time in late February 1429. Within weeks she had managed to convince him and his advisers of the divine origin of her mission; he gave her a suit of white armour and a black charger, and sent her off to join his armies at Blois. There followed the great victory at Orléans (8 May), the winning of Jargeau (11 June) and of Beaugency (17 June), the smashing of the English army at Patay (18 June) and the taking of Troyes leading to the coronation of the Dauphin in Reims (17 July). All this was accomplished in less than five months, and her victories seemed to be achieved effortlessly. This amazing military feat by a teenage girl with

no strategic or military training and no particular physical fortitude needs something more to account for it than just Joan's diamond-hard determination.

Joan's sense of her own inexorable destiny had been instilled into her for three years by her voices at Domrémy. As Edward Lucie-Smith says in his *Joan of Arc* (1976):

> Running through her head [late in 1428] was the prophecy which she was soon to quote to her cousin-by-marriage, Durand Laxart, and to her hostess at Vaucouleurs, Catherine Le Royer: 'Have you not heard that France, lost by a woman, will be saved by a virgin?' To Catherine she added: 'a virgin from the Marches of Lorraine'.

More specifically Joan told a neighbour in June 1428 that 'between Coussey and Vaucouleurs' there was 'a young girl who, before the year is out, will have the King of France crowned'.

Right: the French raising the siege of Orléans (from an illustration in a manuscript in the French Bibliothèque Nationale). The siege had lasted seven months, and Joan relieved the town in a week, after four days of fighting. During one battle she was pierced by an arrow; but after the wound was dressed she returned to the attack. The English eventually withdrew, and Joan rode into Orléans in triumph (below)

Delusions of grandeur

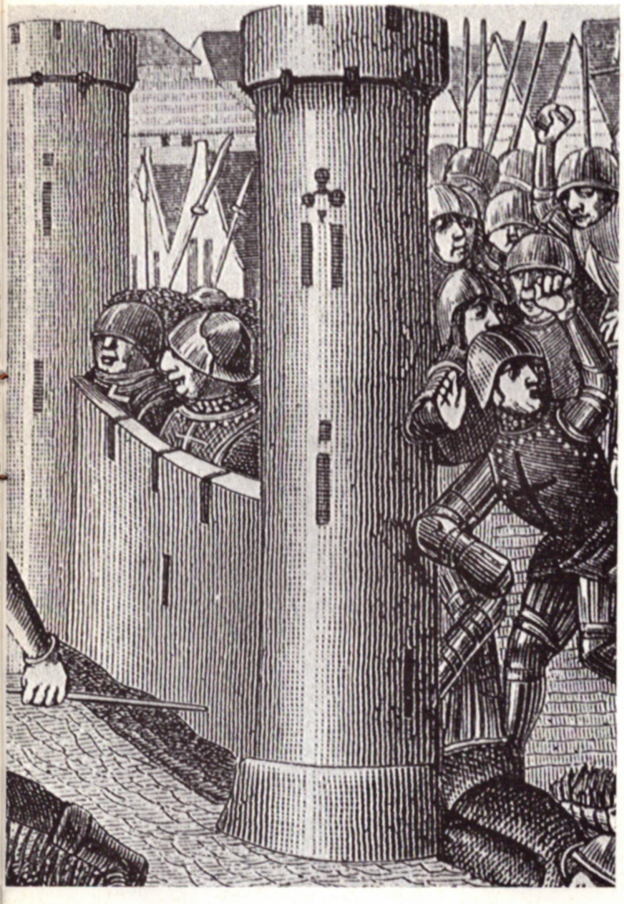
However, Joan's voices lend themselves to other interpretations. When she first heard them she was 13 years old, and going through the tempestuous throes of puberty. During this time of emotional and physical turmoil, some adolescents have been known to experience auditory and visual hallucinations. If this was the explanation behind Joan's voices, Joan certainly exhibited the classic responses: fear at first, followed by a sense of awe and a feeling that the hallucinations were divinely inspired. It does seem possible that Joan's visions came from her own subconscious: they spoke to her in her native tongue; they were all familiar saints (there was – and still is – a statue of St Margaret in the church at Domrémy). Joan was a pious child and these saints would have embedded themselves deep in her mind; from her infancy she would have been taught that saints could manifest themselves to mortals.

According to W.S. Scott, a burning religious passion in an impressionable young girl combined with the disturbed times (her village was frequently raided by bands of undisciplined soldiers) produced Joan's voices: they were

> the inspiration of genius, transmuted into such form as would render it most easily intelligible to an unlettered, intensely religious young village girl of the fifteenth century. She was in no way the possessor of a disordered brain, as is the case with the ordinary type of so many *hallucinées*, but on the contrary her mental capacity was notably excessive rather than deficient.

The 'genius' idea is certainly easier to accept than the idea that Joan was a paranoid or schizophrenic hearer of voices.

The English and the Burgundians, Joan's enemies, believed her voices came from the Devil – nothing else but sorcery could explain the defeats they suffered at her hands.



A 19th-century bas-relief of Joan in prison in Rouen castle, where she was held from December 1430 until her execution at the end of May 1431. The room was in the second largest tower of the castle, and was about 30 feet [9 metres] in diameter; her legs were kept in irons, and she was usually chained at the waist as well. Five guards were with her day and night, and she claimed at her trial that they constantly harassed her sexually

Joan was not invincible, however. After she had seen Charles VII crowned in Reims Cathedral she embarked on an unsuccessful assault on Paris. In May 1430 she was attempting to relieve John of Luxembourg's siege of Compiègne when she was knocked from her horse and taken prisoner.

She was kept in prison, first at Beaurevoir and then at Rouen, until March 1431 when she was brought to trial at Rouen before Pierre Cauchon, bishop of Beauvais, and Jean Le Maistre, vice-inquisitor of France.

She was charged with heresy and witchcraft. She was accused of blasphemous presumption and for claiming to have received divine revelation; she was accused of endorsing her letters with the names of Jesus and Mary, blasphemously and immodestly wearing male attire, and following what she claimed to be the direct commands of God rather than the commands of the Church militant.

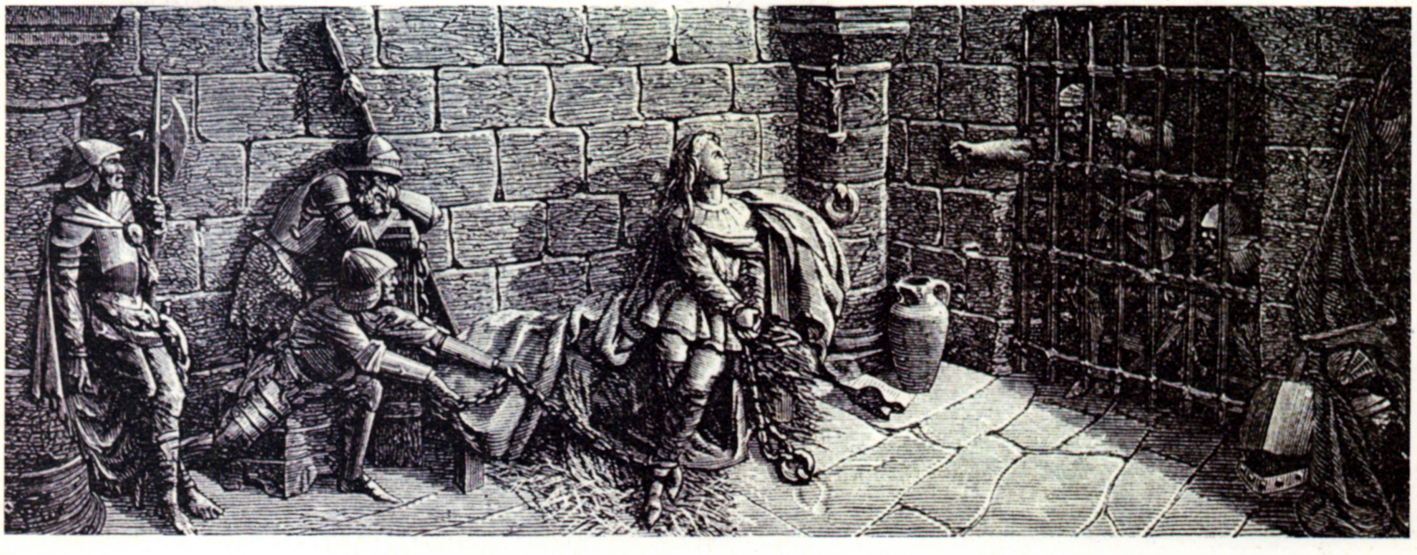
At her trial Joan was obdurate. She refused to reveal most of what the voices had told her, and even the threat of torture could not persuade her to change her mind.

She was found guilty and, seriously ill, was taken to a nearby cemetery where a scaffold had been built; her condemnation and her execution were to be held in public. Her sentence was read out, and she was urged to recant and submit to the Church militant. Joan, probably confused and aware only that she was on the brink of being burnt alive, made a full confession and abjuration of her heresies, including 'worshipping evil spirits and invoking them'. She also agreed to wear women's clothing again.

Instead of being burnt, she was condemned to perpetual imprisonment. A few days later her judges came to her prison cell and found her still wearing men's clothes. (The stories as to why she was doing so vary, but it was probably to protect her from rape from her particularly brutal guards.) She told her judges that she had heard her voices again, and that 'since Thursday her voices had told her that she had done great wrong to God in confessing that what she had done was not well done.'

She had sealed her fate. On 30 May she received confession, and was then taken to the market place in Rouen and declared 'relapsed, excommunicate and heretic'. A high platform had been built for the stake, which was surrounded by a quantity of faggots of wood. There Joan was burnt alive, before an estimated crowd of 10,000. Afterwards the executioner found her heart intact among the ashes.

Was Joan a witch? Or a royal bastard? Did she escape the flames? *See page 2766*



Flight from fear

A young French family were victims of an inventive poltergeist – each day seemed to bring some new torment. ELMAR GRUBER and SUSAN FASSBERG report on how the family coped, and how the force eventually succeeded in hounding them from their home

WHEN CARLA AND THIERRY consulted an exorcist to help them clear their home of the psychic disturbances that were making their lives a misery, they were desperately worried about the mental health of their four-year-old son, Jean. The exorcist reassured the couple that their experiences were by no means unique, and he made an appointment to visit their home at Mulhouse, in France, to rid the apartment of what he called a restless spirit. But before the day of the appointment came, Carla telephoned the exorcist to cancel it. She and Thierry had decided to leave Mulhouse, and planned to be out of the apartment in less than two weeks' time.

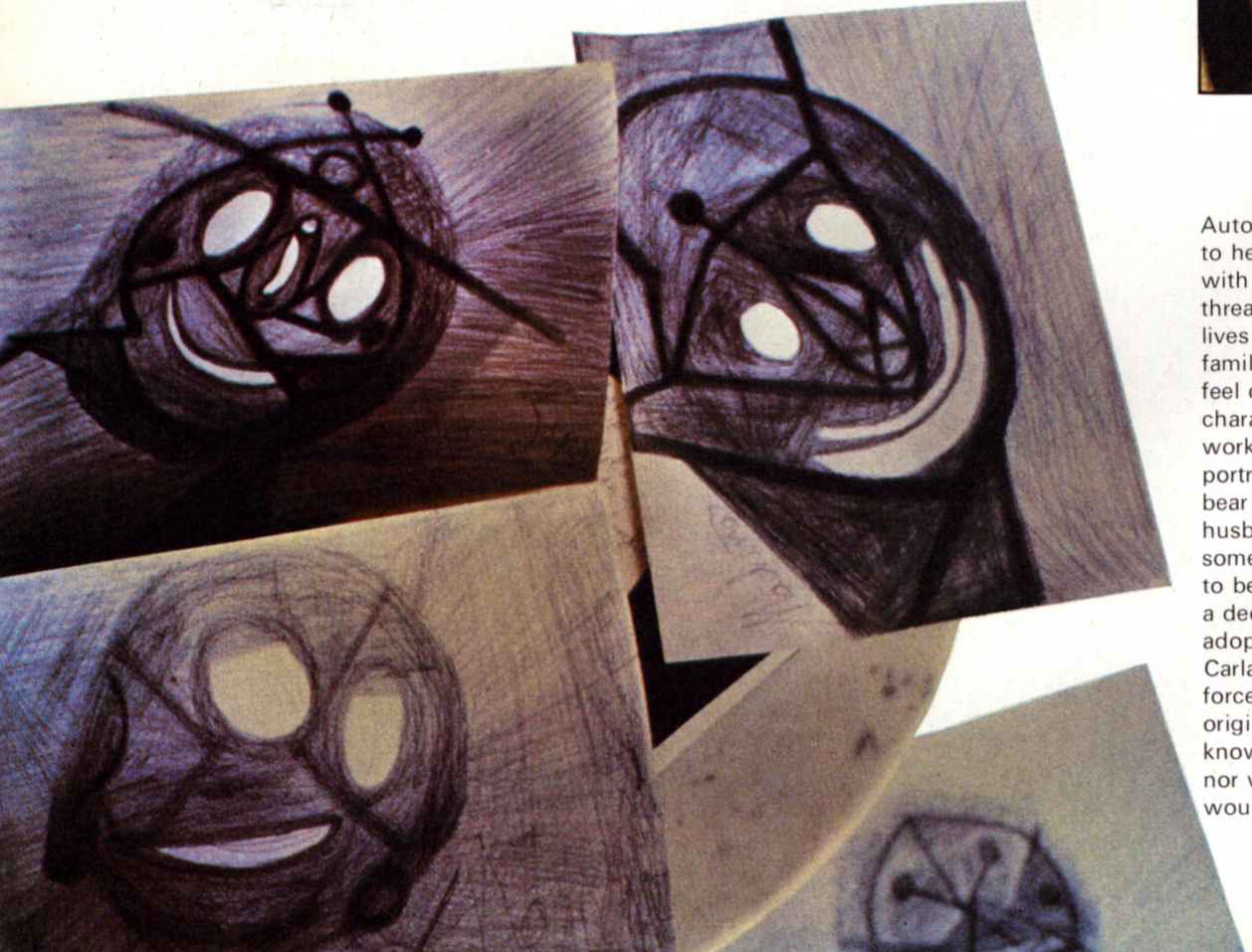
An alarming increase in paranormal activity had led to this decision. One afternoon Carla had gone down to the cellar to get a bottle of wine for the evening meal. Halfway down the stairs, she thought she saw the outline of a dark figure crouched on the landing. Although she was frightened, curiosity prompted her to take a closer look. As she hesitatingly descended a few more steps the figure rose, reached out to her menacingly, and then vanished. Carla screamed and fled back upstairs.

A day or two later the figure appeared again, this time in the apartment. In panic and confusion, Carla ran right through it: it was not seen again.

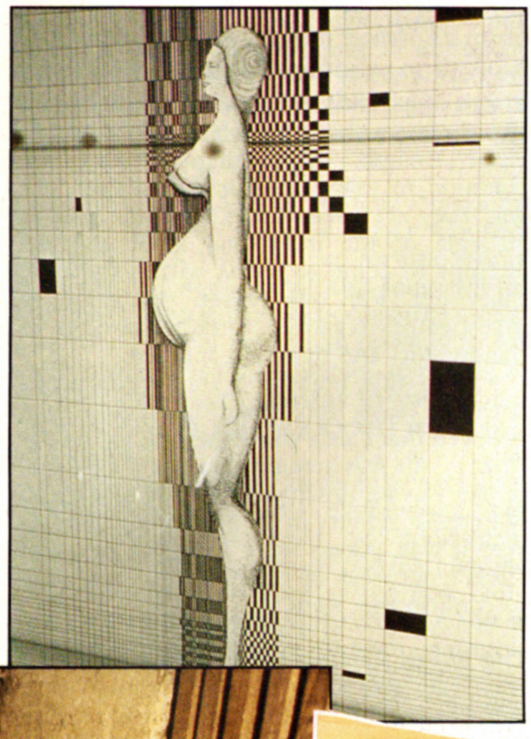
Naturally enough, after this incident Carla did not feel like going down to the cellar to get the wine for dinner, so she sent Thierry. When he got to the cellar door, he found it was impossible to open. It seemed that the ground level beneath the door had risen. Thierry fetched a shovel and started digging out the earth under the door, half expecting to find a grimacing skeleton. He had got only 8 inches (20 centimetres) down when the shovel broke. Since he was now able to open the door, Thierry decided there was no point in digging any further. The hole under the cellar door looked ridiculous, and became a standing joke among the couple's friends.

Two weeks later, on the evening of 17 April 1981, Carla spontaneously entered a trance-like state. This in itself was no longer an uncommon occurrence, and Thierry had taken to keeping a loaded camera in readiness by his bedside, in case something happened that he wanted to record on film. He had taken the precaution of sealing the body of the camera with masking tape to ensure the

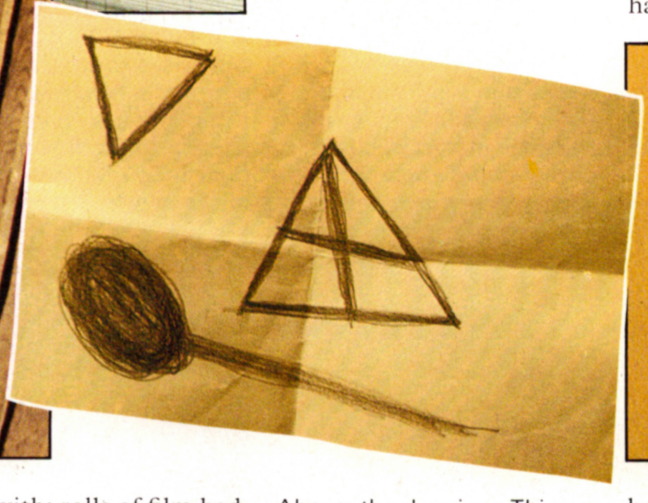
Below: Thierry pointing out the hole in the cellar floor that he was forced to dig in order to open the door. The Freiburg investigators were unable to explain how the ground level beneath the door could have risen. Before the incident occurred Carla had seen a figure crouching nearby



Automatic drawing appeared to help Carla come to terms with the force that was threatening to wreck the lives of herself and her family. The raw, primitive feel of the pictures (left) was characteristic of her early work. Intended as family portraits, they fortunately bear little resemblance to her husband or son and, though some automatic artists claim to be under the influence of a deceased painter and so adopt a recognisable style, Carla had no idea where the force that drove her originated. Neither did she know when it would strike nor what the end product would be



Left: the painting by Thierry that Carla was looking at when she went into her trance. In her subsequent vision she saw the same painting lying in a hole in the cellar together with something shiny. A search revealed a safety pin and a lock of hair (below right) – no one could account for their presence



Above: the drawings Thierry found inside his camera. There seems to be no rational explanation of how the piece of paper got there. The camera had been sealed with tape that had to be cut, using a razor blade, before the contents could be removed. There was no indication that the seal had been tampered with. No one knows whether the symbols were intended to be significant or whether they were the poltergeist's idea of a joke

film was not tampered with: rolls of film had already disappeared from the camera on several occasions.

When Carla went into a trance and began to mumble, Thierry grabbed the camera but, to his amazement, he could feel a lack of tension in the wind-on lever, which told him the camera was empty. When he broke the seal with a razor blade he found that the film was indeed gone: in its place was a small folded piece of paper. Pencilled on this were three designs – a triangle, a triangle with a cross inside it, and a large dark spot with a protruding line. These designs were very similar to those the investigators had found under the bed, and marked on Carla's thigh (see page 2685).

The next morning Carla went into a trance again: her attention seemed to be focused on a painting by Thierry of a pregnant woman that hung on the wall beside the bed. She told Thierry to go down to the cellar, insisting that she could see this painting in the cellar hole with something small and shiny on it. As he got up to go, Thierry paused for a moment to look at the painting. At that instant something dropped to the floor from behind the picture frame – it was the roll of film missing from the camera.

Perplexed, Thierry headed for the cellar; there, in the middle of the hole he had dug, he saw something shiny. It was an open safety pin stuck in the ground, and around it was wrapped a lock of hair. The hair did not belong to anyone in the family, and even the safety pin was not the same kind as the ones they used. The investigators from the Freiburg Institute had never encountered a series of events like this before, and had no explanation to offer.

Nor could they make sense of the series of apparently meaningless pranks that occurred at random during these weeks: the guitar played by itself, horrible smells suddenly invaded the apartment and vanished just as abruptly, Carla and Jean saw Thierry's silhouette walking around the house when he was not there, and water shot out of the kitchen tap like thick foam.

Thierry and Carla decided that they had had enough. They determined to sell their home, and Thierry found a job in the Antilles, on the other side of the world. It was at this point that Carla called the exorcist to cancel their appointment.

The Freiburg investigators believed the phenomena were due to the eruption of some kind of energy or psychic force, which in most instances was focused on Carla. The question was how to subdue this force, or better still direct it into constructive channels. While the scientists, psychologists and parapsychologists were discussing the problem Carla was living in the middle of it and, in her own way, trying to solve it.

Quite unexpectedly, Carla began to produce automatic drawings. Like many other mediumistic artists she was surprised and delighted with her pictures, which seemed to draw themselves. She never knew what the outcome of her 'efforts' would be, and even the titles of her pictures were written without her conscious participation. Her first drawings were grotesque family portraits, with a driven quality to them. Later drawings exhibited more detail, and a lightness of touch;

Above: Carla holds up a portrait of her son. This was one of her first automatic drawings; many more were to follow. An example from her later efforts (below) shows how, with time, her style changed. The drawing has none of the ferocious quality of the earlier work when, in her attempt to get the pictures down, she tore the paper on which she was working

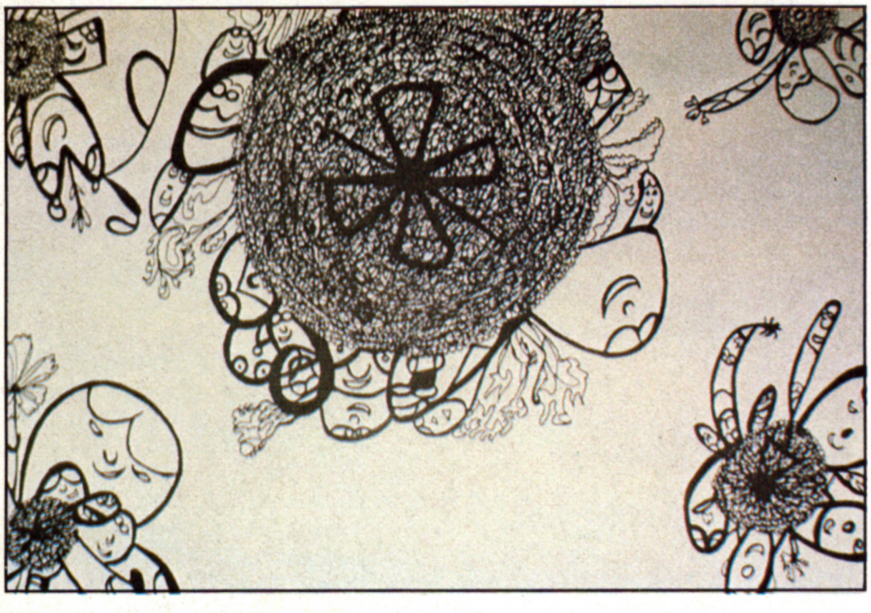
they often represented scenes from her childhood.

It became obvious that the process of drawing was an outlet that allowed Carla to express and release pent-up conflicts and problems. She said, 'I don't know exactly why I started to draw, but somehow it was a strong urge. I felt as if I had to get things on paper. . . . My work was raw and strong, and sometimes the paper would tear because I was using too much force. I must confess I was shocked at first, although now that my pictures have become softer and less impulsive I can look back at the first ones and see them as the expression of some strong feelings.'

She added that it was this directness of expression, in an unsophisticated style, that made the pictures so attractive to her.

The development from a crude, almost violent, style to a softer, more lyrical one is typical of the change that is exhibited by several automatic artists. And the structure of Carla's work is also typical of other automatic drawing. It includes the obsessive repetition of graphic detail, such as small scales or circles; filling up spaces with face-like designs; and using one line to represent two forms, as in a 'gestalt switch' picture. Even though these characteristics are common to many mediumistic artists, the way they are used can express the unique struggle of the individual artist and his attempt to come to terms with a dynamic inner life. For this reason the Freiburg investigators regarded Carla's drawings as therapeutic, and to be encouraged.

Up to this point everybody concerned with the case, including the family, had believed that Carla was either the psi source (that is, she was actually causing the events) or she was an unwitting catalyst setting off poltergeist activity in the apartment. Whichever it was, events were linked to her, and Carla's outbreak of creative activity tended to confirm this view.



The Mme Arricot connection

However, while Carla and Thierry were strapping up the last boxes to be sent to their new home, they were visited by a neighbour. Surprised to see their preparations, he asked why they were moving. Thierry said something about a change of job and mentioned Carla's 'difficulty in sleeping'. The neighbour then told them that the previous owner of the house, a certain Madame Arricot, had also had trouble falling asleep due to 'unexplained knockings and the mysterious opening and closing of doors' when she was alone in the house. She had sold the house, said the neighbour, because of these disturbances. 'I suppose you don't know,' he added, 'that she recently passed away?' This was news indeed – was the house haunted after all?

But Carla and Thierry had no time to consider this new piece of information. Two days later the Freiburg team met them at the airport where they were anxiously awaiting the departure of their flight to the Antilles. Last goodbyes were said, and the family walked happily to the customs hall. A few minutes later Carla reappeared in tears. All her identity papers – the ones she had so carefully put in her handbag that morning – were missing.

It took a lot of fast talking and diplomacy, plus the testimony of several witnesses, to get Carla on that aeroplane. But finally they were off. A few weeks later Carla and Thierry wrote from Guadeloupe to say that everything was fine, more or less. Carla had found her papers in the new apartment, underneath the mattress of the bed. And the television had broken down, for no apparent reason, seven times.

Was Carla causing these electrical problems? Or had the mischievous poltergeist taken a transatlantic trip? The Freiburg investigators had to confess themselves baffled, and the riddles remain unanswered.

Salem: that way madness lies

The very words 'witch hunt' summon up a picture of mindless, hysterical persecution of the innocent – which would aptly describe the ugly events of Salem in the 17th century. FRANK SMYTH describes the horror

JUST AFTER CHRISTMAS 1691, seven young girls of Salem Village in Essex County, Massachusetts, USA, took up fortune telling in order to while away the long winter months. They used an egg poured into a wine glass as a 'crystal ball' in an attempt to see their future husbands. Instead, according to the Rev. John Hale of nearby Beverly: 'there came up a coffin, that is, a specter in likeness of a coffin.'

It was an apt omen; 10 months later, as a direct result of the girls' experiments, the little Puritan community lay devastated. Twenty people had been executed for witchcraft, while over 100 more lay in prison, their property confiscated, and the name of Salem – changed to Danvers in the 20th century – had become a synonym for mindless persecution. As a Boston merchant, Thomas Brattle, wrote prophetically: 'I am afraid that ages will not wear off that reproach and those stains which these things will leave behind them upon our land.'

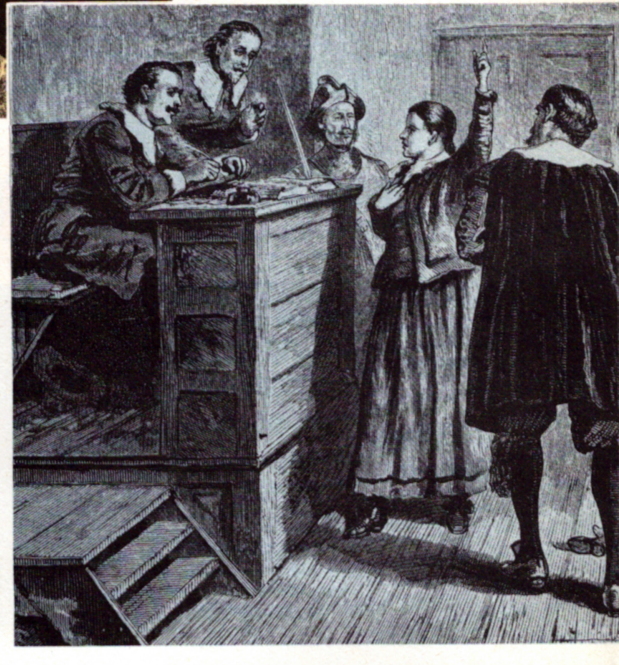
Compared with the great witch hunts of Europe, that of Salem was insignificant. In the mid 17th century, for instance, an estimated 900 witches had been burned in the city of Bamburg alone and 5000 in the province of Alsace, while in the English county of Essex – from which the Massachusetts district took its name – the 'Witchfinder General' Matthew Hopkins had dispatched to the gallows at least twice as many victims as were to hang at Salem.

Salem's abiding horror lies in the fact that it was the last major instance of a sober, rational and industrious society riving itself apart literally through fear of the Devil. The details of how it did so exist in abundance; in voluminous court records, over 50 written 'confessions', ecclesiastical journals and contemporary letters. Despite two centuries of historical analysis, the reason why the reign of terror took place still remains largely conjectural.

'When these calamities first began,' wrote

Salem's usually sedate courtroom assumes the riotous madness of Bedlam. In just 10 months the God-fearing Puritan community had – merely on the accusations of some teenage girls experimenting with the occult – executed 20 people on charges of witchcraft and ruined countless local families

Left: brutal though such treatment may seem today, the pillory, stocks or whipping were the relatively mild punishments for those charged with witchcraft in Salem – before the infamous witch hunt began. Indeed the little community was remarkably tolerant for its time, and boasted such notables as the Rev. Increase Mather (bottom left), who helped to found Harvard University, and his son, the Rev. Cotton Mather (below left) who, despite an undeserved notoriety during the Salem trials, was a tolerant and advanced thinker about 'possession'



the Rev. Samuel Parris, 'which was in my own family, the affliction was several weeks before such hellish operations as witchcraft were suspected.'

Parris was minister of Salem Village and, like the majority of Massachusetts clergymen of the time, a Puritan. However, the New England Puritans had, by the 1690s, become a remarkably tolerant and well-balanced society. Ingersoll's Tavern in Salem Village was patronised by clergy and laity alike, people 'living in sin' were frowned upon but unmolested, and true poverty was almost non-existent. Intellectually, standards were high; Harvard University, on the outskirts of Boston 15 miles (24 kilometres) to the south of Salem Village, was founded largely through the efforts of the Rev. Increase Mather, who was to play a prominent advisory part in the witchcraft trials, while Samuel Sewell, one of the Salem judges, was writing his tract *The selling of Joseph*, the first anti-slavery pamphlet published in America.

Too tolerant to be true?

Prosecutions for witchcraft – despite a widespread belief in the Devil and his works – were rare. Only half a dozen 'witches' had been hanged in the province during the entire 17th century, while a handful more were sentenced to the relatively mild punishments of whipping, fines or exile. In fact almost every village had its 'wise' man or woman, to whom the residents went for healing potions and love charms. The Rev. Cotton Mather, Increase's son, who was to gain an unjustly infamous name during the Salem persecutions, took a tolerant and relatively scientific interest in witchcraft. A former medical student and fellow of the Royal Society, he invited a number of 'possessed' persons into his own home, first searching for signs of organic illness before 'treating' them through prayer and fasting.

It was to prayer and fasting that the Rev. Parris turned when his nine-year-old daughter Elizabeth and 11-year-old niece Abigail Williams began to throw fits after experimenting with the glass and egg. Five other girls were also affected: 12-year-old Ann Putnam and four older girls, Elizabeth Hubbard, Mary Walcott, Mary Warren and Mercy Lewis, whose ages ranged from 16 to 20. The Rev. Parris wisely removed his daughter and niece to the home of a friend in Salem Town 5 miles (8 kilometres) away; the remaining five were to form the 'accusers'.

'Their motions in their fits are preternatural,' wrote the Rev. Deodat Lawson, 'both as to the manner, which is so strange as a well person could not screw their body into; and as to the violence . . . it is . . . much beyond the ordinary force of the same person when

they are in their right mind.'

Later the girls suffered hallucinations, seeing 'spectral' figures who beat, scratched and bit them – often leaving actual marks on their flesh – and struck them temporarily blind, deaf and dumb. They also suffered loss of appetite and had choking attacks. In fact they all exhibited classic symptoms of what is now recognised as hysteria – in the clinical, rather than the colloquial, sense of the word. As one modern author, Chadwick Hansen, puts it: 'with minor exceptions the girls' behavior belongs to the history of pathology rather than the history of fraud.' But practical psychiatry lay 200 years in the future; when the Rev. Parris finally took the girls to the local doctor, William Griggs, he announced: 'The Evil Hand is upon them' – in other words, he believed they were bewitched.

The dog it was . . .

That having been established, at least the lay people of Salem knew what to do. Mary Walcott's aunt Mary Sibley visited the Rev. Parris's Carib Indian slaves John and Tituba and asked them to bake a cake of meal mixed with the girls' urine – an ancient counter-spell against spells and curses – which, on 25 February 1692, was fed to the Parris family dog. The 'spell' worked; the dog died, and the girls were able to name their tormentors – Tituba the slave, and two local 'wise women' Sarah Good and Sarah Osburn.

When he heard about the cake the Rev. Parris was appalled; like other contemporary clergymen he believed that 'counter-spells' were as sinful as the original spells. Through the 'witch cake', he said, 'the Devil hath been raised among us, and his rage is vehement and terrible; and when he shall be silenced, the Lord only knows.'

Parris spoke more truthfully than he knew, but the revelation of 'guilty names' had set the wheels of justice in motion, for on 29 February four 'yeomen of Salem Village' swore out warrants for the arrest of Tituba, Sarah Good and Sarah Osburn, and the following day they were brought before the community's two magistrates, John Hathorne and Jonathan Corwin. Hathorne, in particular, seems instantly to have adopted an inquisitorial, rather than magisterial, role, assuming the guilt of the parties before they were even asked to plead. 'Sarah Good,' he asked, 'what evil spirits have you familiarity with? Have you made no contract with the Devil? Why do you thus torment these poor children?' – and so on. In the case of Sarah Good he may have felt justified, for her own husband William testified that he thought she was either 'a witch or would be one very quickly' because of her 'bad carriage to him', and her four-year-old daughter Dorcas claimed that her mother kept black and yellow birds as familiars that 'hurt the children and afflicted persons'.

When the girls were asked to face Sarah Good and say whether she was one of their tormentors, they all immediately fell into fits and 'were dreadfully tortured and tormented for a short space of time'. When recovered, they said that Good's 'spectre' had come and tormented them, 'though her body remained at a considerable distance from them.'

This introduction of what became known as 'spectral evidence' was to be the cause of dissension between the clergy and the judiciary; among its prominent opponents was Cotton Mather, who pointed out that 'the odd effects produced upon the sufferers by the look or touch of the accused are things wherein the Devils may as much impose upon some harmless people as by the representation of their shapes.'

In other words, if the Devil had power to run loose in Salem he also had, in the words of Hamlet, 'power to assume a pleasing shape'. Only clear evidence of a 'pact' between an accused person and the Devil

Above: a 'bewitched' girl falls in convulsions before a Salem court. No matter how wild her accusations – even during such fits – wherever she pointed her finger some wretch was arrested, accused of sorcery and imprisoned, fined or even hanged – as this model scene (right) from the Salem Witch Museum shows

should be admitted, insisted Mather, otherwise 'innocent, aye virtuous' people were at risk. But the magistrates were, perhaps understandably, impressed by the fact that the girls flew into fits when faced with, or touched by, an 'accused' person.

In vain Robert Pike, a magistrate from nearby Salisbury, pointed out that it would be the height of folly for a person pleading innocent to charges of witchcraft at the same time to perform acts of witchcraft in the courtroom by causing the girls to have fits: 'self-interest,' he said, 'teaches everyone better.'

In the cases of the first three women, however, there was little need to convict them on 'spectral evidence'. Sarah Good, a vicious old woman according to her husband's testimony, was known to mutter under her breath when passing people who had annoyed her – surely she must be reciting curses? Sarah Osburn admitted that she had dreamed of 'a thing like an Indian, all black, which did prick her in the neck' – surely this was the Devil 'marking her' for his own?

Salem – or Danvers as it is known today – in Massachusetts is a thriving tourist attraction. Visitors enjoy taking photographs of the 'witch house' (above), whose sinister air remains remarkably potent, and of Gallows Hill (left) – which in another location might be an ideal picnic spot. In the summer Danvers is crowded with sightseers, but two centuries ago it was a place to be avoided

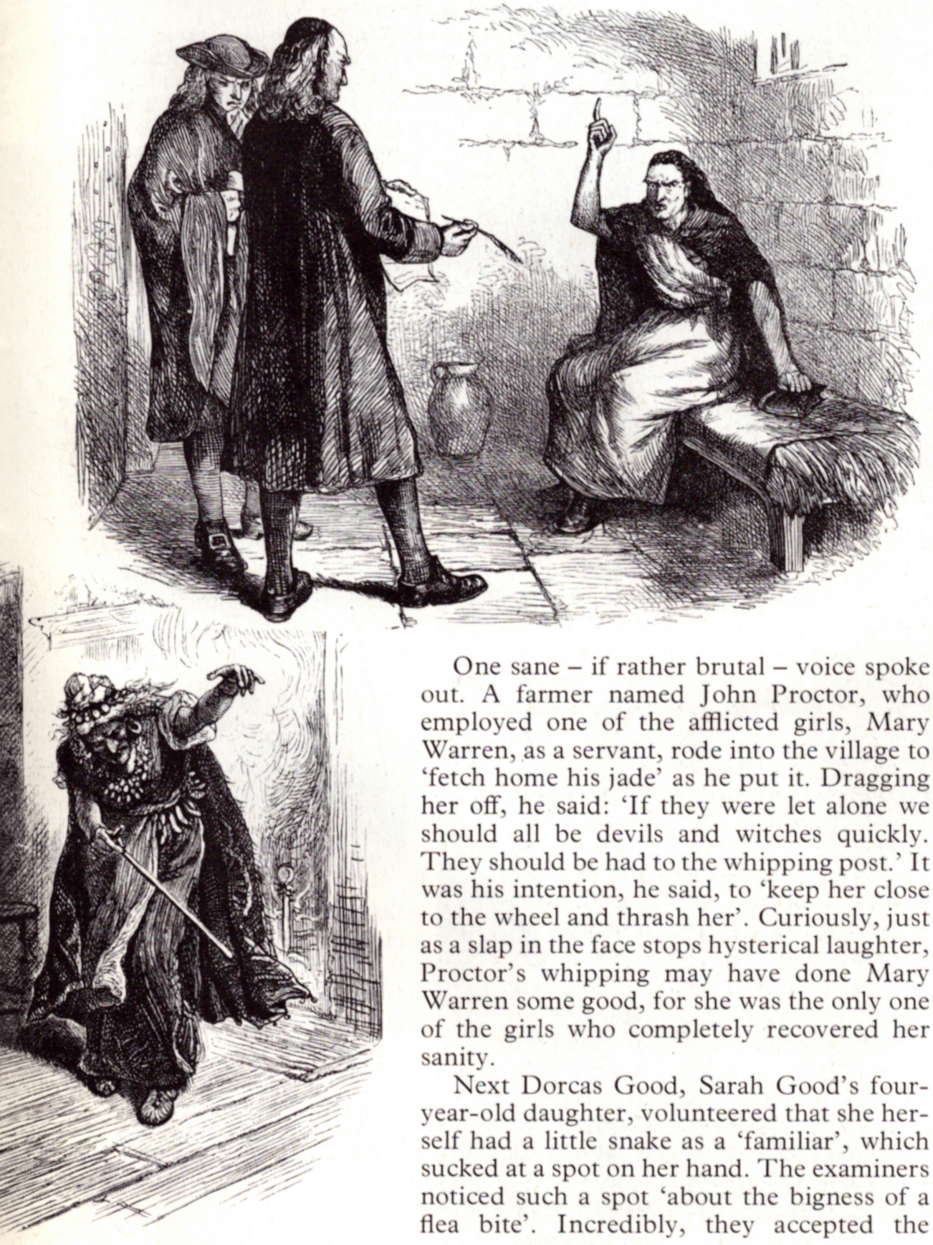
But the evidence of the slave Tituba was most sensational of all, and opened a new dimension of unease – it seemed that an organised coven was operating in the neighbourhood. She had, she said, met the Devil in the shape of a tall black man with white hair. Sometimes he had come in the shape of an animal. He had brought a book and made her place her mark in it 'red like blood', thus binding her to him for six years. There had been nine marks altogether in the book, two of them made by Good and Osburn, two made by 'witches from Boston'. Both Good and Osburn, she said, had familiars: cats, birds, and a 'thing with wings and two legs and a head like a woman'. Most disturbing of all, Osburn had 'a thing all over hairy, all the face hairy, and a long nose, and I don't know how to tell how the face looks.' It had two legs 'and goeth upright like a man, and last night it stood in Mr Parris's hall.'

The three women were committed to jail. Osburn died there on 10 May, and the slave Tituba was left there until she was sold to pay her jailer's fees – the Rev. Parris being too shocked, no doubt, by the revelations of what had gone on in his house, to pay them. Sarah Good lay awaiting sentence.

Meanwhile, Friday, 11 March was appointed as a day of fasting and prayer during which the ministers of Essex County would meet for a consultation. But instead of agreement another seed of dissension was sown when the girls did just what Cotton Mather feared: they accused a respectable church member, Martha Corey, of witchcraft.

Goodwife Corey had been sceptical from the first of the 'witchcraft' charges, even refusing to allow her husband to visit the magistrate's examinations. When she expressed her scepticism in court – 'we must not believe all that these distracted children say' – she annoyed Judge Hathorne. But

Below: Martha Corey, a highly respectable member of the community, being asked to sign a confession that she is a witch. This was what the Rev. Cotton Mather had feared – that the witch hunt was a contagion from which no one, no matter what their previous reputation, was safe. But the most spectacular terror was engendered by the 'evidence' of the slave Tituba (bottom), who told of a local coven, familiars and all. There was, however, no real evidence to support this allegation – but in the prevailing atmosphere none was needed



much more damning, when she bit her lip in concentration, the children complained of being 'bitten' in the same place, the marks showing clearly.

Again the clergy, in the person of the Rev. Deodat Lawson, cautioned the magistrates against precipitate action. In church, Lawson preached that 'rash censuring of others, without sufficient grounds . . . is indeed to be like the Devil, who . . . is a false accuser.'

But the damage had been done. On the very day of Lawson's sermon one of the most benevolent members of the community, a regular church-goer named Rebecca Nurse, was accused. Even Judge Hathorne was uncertain at this turn of events, as his questioning shows; he expressed his doubts and prayed that God might 'clear you if you be innocent'. Nevertheless, precedents had been established, and the community was beginning to think the testimony of the children infallible.

One sane – if rather brutal – voice spoke out. A farmer named John Proctor, who employed one of the afflicted girls, Mary Warren, as a servant, rode into the village to 'fetch home his jade' as he put it. Dragging her off, he said: 'If they were let alone we should all be devils and witches quickly. They should be had to the whipping post.' It was his intention, he said, to 'keep her close to the wheel and thrash her'. Curiously, just as a slap in the face stops hysterical laughter, Proctor's whipping may have done Mary Warren some good, for she was the only one of the girls who completely recovered her sanity.

Next Dorcas Good, Sarah Good's four-year-old daughter, volunteered that she herself had a little snake as a 'familiar', which sucked at a spot on her hand. The examiners noticed such a spot 'about the bigness of a flea bite'. Incredibly, they accepted the 'confession' of the toddler without question. The Rev. Parris further confused matters by preaching a sermon to the effect that, as Judas had betrayed Christ, so a devout church member – Rebecca Nurse – might well be the servant of Satan in disguise. When Rebecca's sister, Sarah Cloyse, heard this she got up and left the church, slamming the door behind her. It was enough: next day the girls had pointed the finger at her – and she, too, was accused on 4 April, along with Elizabeth Proctor, wife of the farmer who had saved Mary Warren.

Law, order – and lunacy

At this point four other magistrates were appointed to sit with Corwin and Hathorne, including Thomas Danforth, deputy governor of the colony, but it was Hathorne, the bit firmly between his teeth, who continued to be the driving force. John Proctor joined his wife in the dock, closely followed by his servant Mary Warren – 'cured' by the whipping she had received, she in turn was accused by her former fellow sufferers.

On 19 April Giles Corey, husband of Martha Corey, was dragged before the court along with two new suspects, a young girl named Abigail Hobbes and a woman named Bridget Bishop who had a long-standing reputation as a witch. Abigail Hobbes was a prankster who loved shocking her elders. Once she had mocked the sacrament of baptism by pouring water over her mother's head, and on another occasion told a friend that she had 'sold herself body and soul to the Old Boy' – presumably the Devil.

Bridget Bishop had been accused of witchcraft 10 years previously, but had been released when the Rev. Hale defended her. Nevertheless, it is likely that she was one of the three or four 'real' witches turned up by the Salem enquiry: witch dolls stuck with pins were found in her house; certainly many people willingly testified to her malice and her open avowal of supernatural powers.

Another 'real' witch was Candy, a Negro slave from Barbados, who gave a demonstration of her 'powers' in court by tying knots in rags. As these were first burned and then placed under water, so the afflicted girls suffered spectacularly; one was 'presently burned on the hand' while two were 'choked and strived for breath as if underwater'.

Cotton Mather was later to point out that by allowing these experiments to take place the magistrates themselves were actively condoning witchcraft, but by this time any means of combating the 'evil' seemed permissible, so deep did it run. For it was one thing to accuse the likes of Bridget Bishop, Candy, Dorcas Hoar, the Beverly 'wise woman', and 'Mammy' Redd, 'town witch' of Marblehead, but quite another to find a former minister of Salem Village in the dock.

As the witch hunt runs its course, Salem's insanity increases. See page 2774

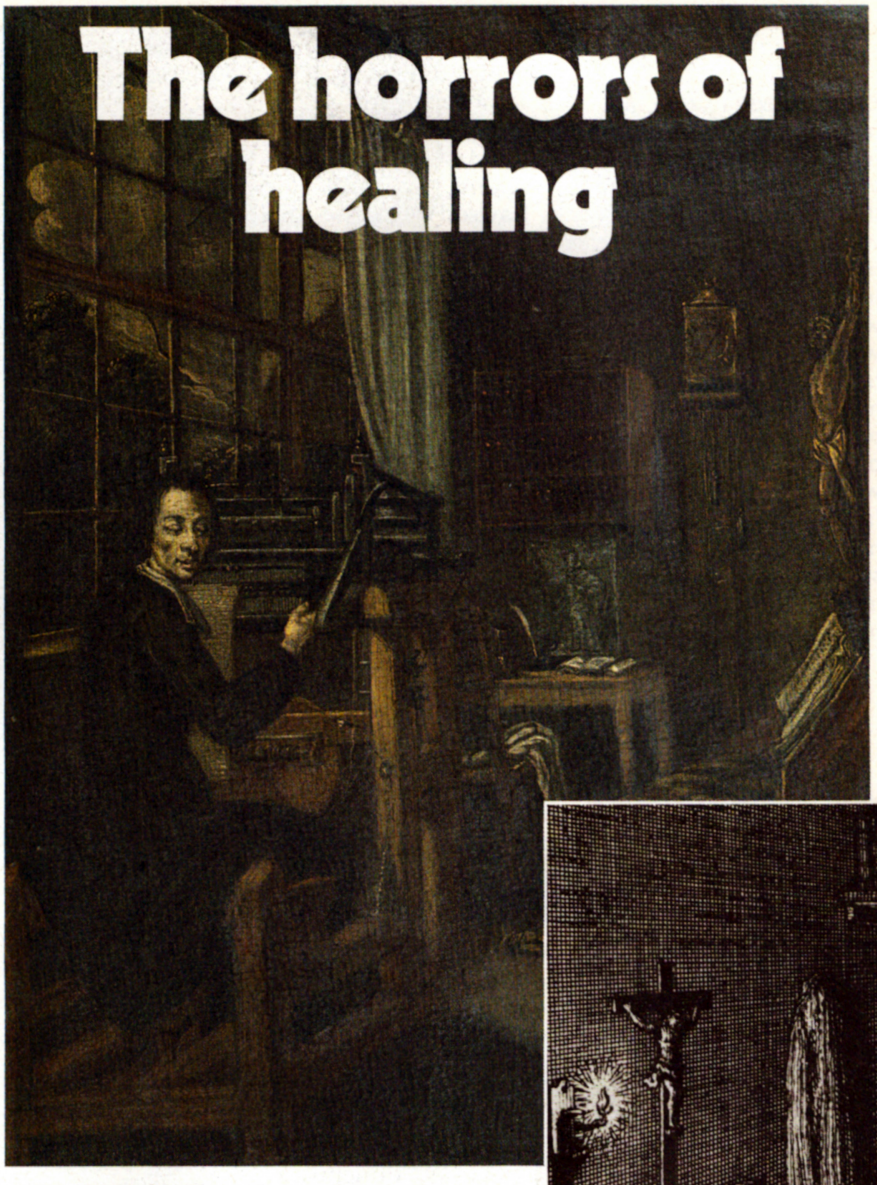
The horrors of healing

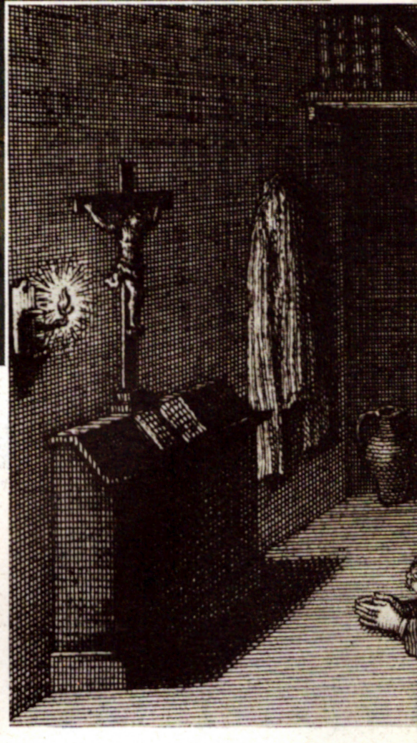
In 18th-century France the women devotees of the newly deceased Deacon of Paris underwent tortures that should have been more than flesh could bear – yet they flourished on them and, reports COLIN WILSON, miraculously healed the sick and crippled poor

THE STRANGE EVENTS that took place in the little Paris churchyard of St Médard between 1727 and 1732 sound so incredible, so preposterous, that the modern reader is tempted to dismiss them as pure invention. This would be a mistake, for an impressive mass of documents, including accounts by doctors, magistrates and other respectable public figures, attests to their genuineness. The miracles undoubtedly took place. But no doctor, philosopher or scientist has even begun to explain them.

They began with the burial of François de Pâris, the Deacon of Paris, in May 1727. François was only 37 years old, yet he was revered as a holy man, with powers of healing. He was a follower of Bishop Cornelius Jansen, who taught that men can be saved only by divine grace, not by their own efforts. The Deacon had no doubt whatever that his own healing powers came from God.

Great crowds followed his coffin, many weeping. It was laid in a tomb behind the high altar of St Médard. Then the congregation filed past, laying their flowers on the corpse. A father supported his son, a cripple, as he leaned over the coffin. Suddenly, the child went into convulsions; he seemed to be having a fit. Several people helped to drag him, writhing, to a quiet corner of the church. Suddenly, the convulsions stopped. The boy opened his eyes, looked around in

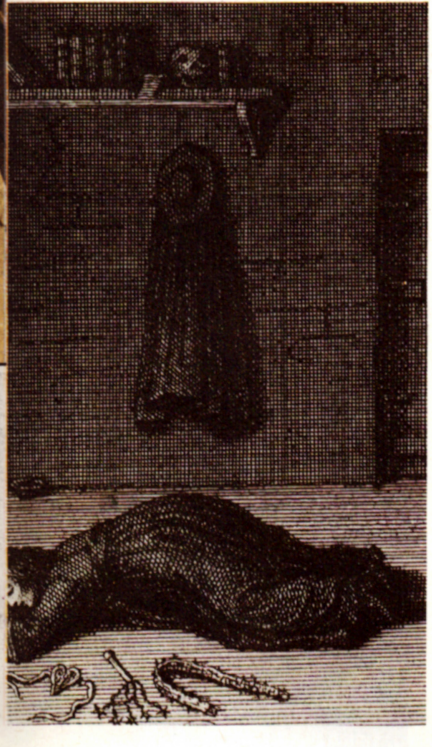




Left: the scene at the churchyard of St Médard following the burial of François de Pâris in 1727. A few wealthy people were present, but the poor and sick predominated. The miraculous healing of a crippled child was the first of the extraordinary events that were to bring crowds flocking to the churchyard

Left: François de Pâris, Deacon of Paris, gained the love of the poor and the enmity of the Church hierarchy during his short life. Uniquely among clerics of the time he worked with his own hands: here he is seen weaving a tapestry, the proceeds of the sale of which are to go to the poor

Right: the prodigious feats performed by the devotees of François de Pâris were all repulsive in some way. Women were beaten with clubs, pounded with rocks, and stabbed with spears and swords. Others plunged their heads into fire or licked the ulcers of sick people. Yet they emerged from their ordeals unharmed and smiling – and the sick were healed



Above: during his life de Pâris practised cruel self-mortifications. During his devotions he would whip himself with barbed flails. In a similar way the miraculous activities of his devotees seemed to show that God could enable human beings to endure any torture – and could even transform it into pleasure for the victim

bewilderment, and then slowly stood up. A look of incredulous joy crossed his face; then, to the astonishment of the spectators, he began to dance up and down, singing and laughing. His father found it impossible to believe, for the boy was using his withered right leg, which had virtually no muscles. Later it was claimed that the leg had become as strong and normal as the other.

The marvels multiply

The news spread. Within hours cripples, lepers, hunchbacks and blind men were rushing to the church. At first, few 'respectable' people believed the stories of miraculous cures – the majority of the Deacon's followers were poor people. The rich preferred to leave their spiritual affairs in the hands of the Jesuits, who were more cultivated and worldly. But it soon became clear that ignorance and credulity could not be used as a blanket explanation for all the stories of marvels. Deformed limbs, it was said, were being straightened; hideous growths and cancers were disappearing without trace; horrible sores and wounds were healing instantly.

The Jesuits declared that the miracles were either a fraud or the work of the Devil; the result was that most of the better-off people in Paris flatly refused to believe that anything unusual was taking place in the churchyard of St Médard. But a few men of intellect were drawn by curiosity, and they invariably returned from the churchyard profoundly shaken. Sometimes they recorded their testimony in print: some, such as one Philippe Hecquet, attempted to explain the events by natural causes. Others, such as the Benedictine Bernard Louis de la Taste, attacked the people who performed the miracles on theological grounds, but were unable to expose any deception or error by them, or any error on the part of the witnesses. The accumulation of written testimony was such that David Hume, one of the greatest of philosophers, wrote in *An enquiry concerning human understanding* (1758):

> There surely never was a greater number of miracles ascribed to one person. . . . But what is more extraordinary; many of the miracles were immediately proved upon the spot, before judges of unquestioned integrity, attested by witnesses of credit and distinction, in a learned age. . . . Where shall we find such a number of circumstances, agreeing to the corroboration of one fact?

One of those who investigated the happenings was a lawyer named Louis Adrien de Paige. When he told his friend, the magistrate Louis-Basile Carré de Montgeron, what he had seen, the magistrate assured him patronisingly that he had been taken in by conjuring tricks – the kind of 'miracles' performed by tricksters at fairgrounds. But he finally agreed to go with Paige to the churchyard, if only for the pleasure of pointing out how the lawyer had been deceived. They went there on the morning of 7 September 1731. And de Montgeron left the churchyard a changed man – he even endured prison rather than deny what he had seen that day.

The first thing the magistrate saw when he entered the churchyard was a number of women writhing on the ground, twisting

Marie Anne Couronneau was completely paralysed in her left leg (far left); the two doctors here attending her pronounced the affliction 'absolutely incurable'. But she was allegedly healed by the *convulsionnaires* of St Médard – and celebrated by running up a flight of stairs waving her crutches in the air (left)

themselves into the most startling shapes, sometimes bending backwards until the backs of their heads touched their heels. These ladies were all wearing a long cloth undergarment that fastened around the ankles. M. Paige explained that this was now obligatory for all women who wished to avail themselves of the Deacon's miraculous powers. In the early days, when women had stood on their heads or bent their bodies convulsively, prurient young men had begun to frequent the churchyard to view the spectacle.

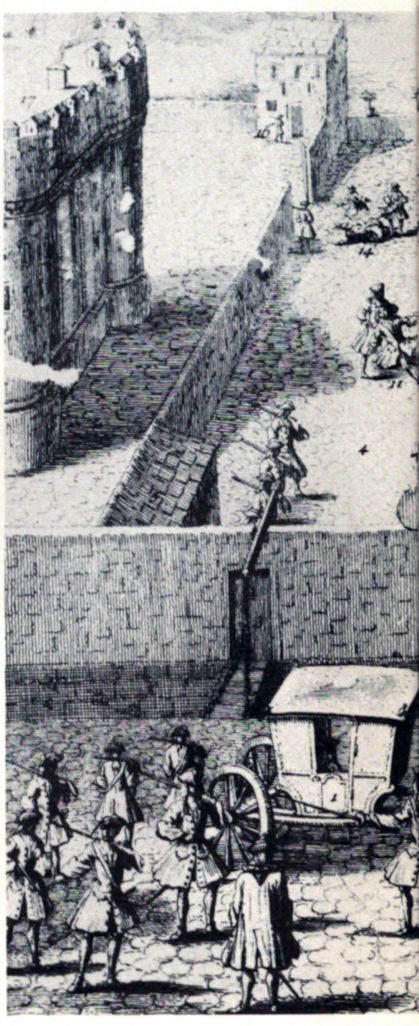
However, there was no lack of male devotees of the deceased Abbé to assist in the activities in the churchyard. Montgeron was shocked to see that some of the women and girls were being sadistically beaten – at least, that is what at first appeared to be going on. Men were striking them with heavy pieces of wood and iron. Other women lay on the ground, apparently crushed under immensely heavy weights. One girl was naked to the waist: a man was gripping her nipples with a pair of iron tongs and twisting them violently. Paige explained that none of these women felt any pain; on the contrary, many begged for more blows. And an incredible number of them were cured of deformities or diseases by this violent treatment.

In another part of the churchyard they saw an attractive, pink-cheeked girl of about 19, who was sitting at a trestle table and eating. That seemed normal enough until Montgeron looked more closely at the food on the plate, and realised from its appearance – as well as from the smell that reached him – that it was human excrement. In between mouthfuls of this sickening fare, she drank a yellow liquid, which, Paige explained, was urine. This girl had come to the churchyard to be cured of what we would now call a neurosis: she had to wash her hands hundreds of times a day, and was so fastidious about her food that she would taste nothing that had been touched by another human hand. The Deacon had indeed cured her. Within days, she was eating excrement and drinking urine, and did so with every sign of enjoyment. Such cases might not be remarkable in asylums; but what was more extraordinary – indeed, preposterous – was that after one of these meals, she opened her mouth as if to be sick, and milk came pouring out. Monsieur Paige had collected a cupful; it was apparently perfectly ordinary cow's milk.

After staggering away from the eater of excrement, Montgeron had to endure a

worse ordeal. In another part of the churchyard, a number of women had volunteered to cleanse suppurating wounds and boils by sucking them clean. Trying hard to prevent himself vomiting, Montgeron watched as someone unwound a dirty bandage from the leg of a small girl; the smell was horrible. The leg was a festering mass of sores, some so deep that the bone was visible. The woman who had volunteered to clean it was one of the *convulsionnaires* – she had been miraculously cured and converted by her bodily contortions, and God had now chosen her to demonstrate how easily human beings' disgust can be overcome. Yet even she blenched as she saw and smelt the gangrened leg. She

The principal chronicler of the miracles of St Médard, Louis-Basile de Montgeron, presented the first volume of his account to King Louis XV (below left) – and was thrown into prison for his pains. The royal displeasure, prompted by the Jesuits' disapproval of de Pâris and all his works, was eventually visited on the *convulsionnaires*: they and many of their supporters were dragged off to the Bastille (below)



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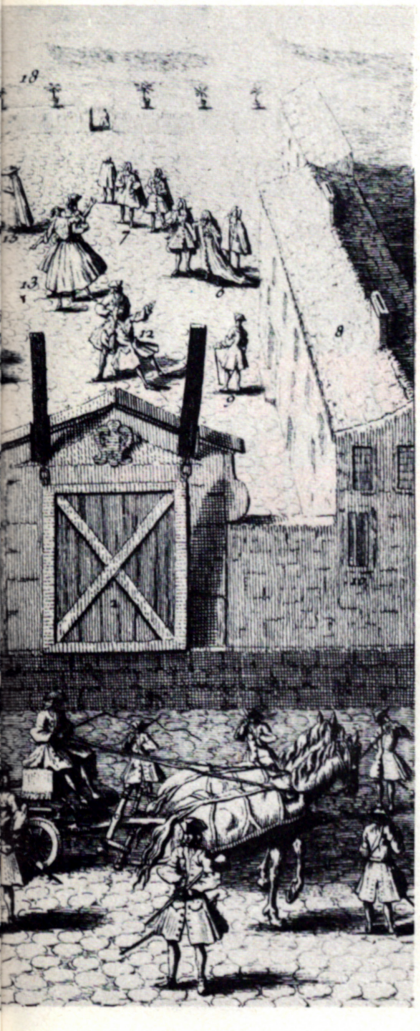
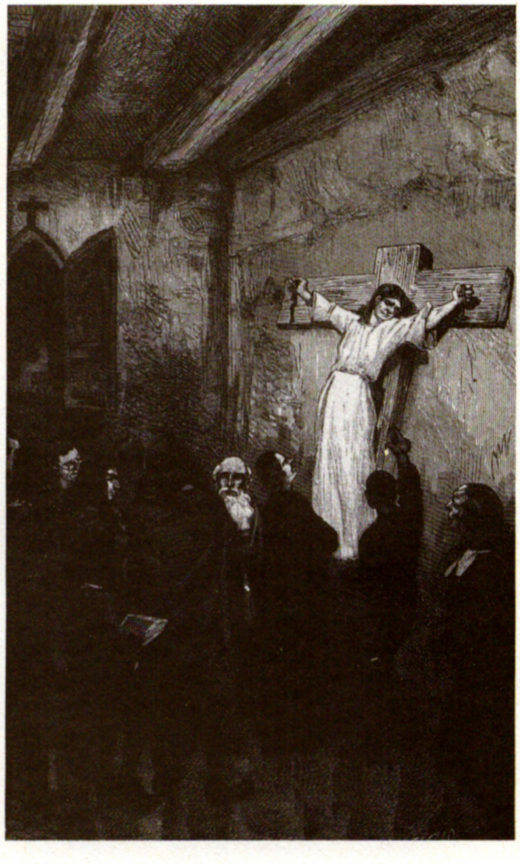
Valentine Dyall, *Unsolved mysteries*, Hutchinson 1954
David Hume, *On human nature and understanding*, Collier-Macmillan 1962

Below right: long after the suppression of the activities at St Médard, bursts of religious zeal occasionally reappeared in Paris: one of the many crucifixions indulged in by a girl named Sister Françoise was recorded by the scientist La Condamine. After more than three hours on the cross she was taken down, exhausted but little the worse for the ordeal



cast her eyes up to heaven, prayed silently for a moment, then bent her head and began to lap, swallowing the septic matter. When she moved her face further down the child's leg, Montgeron could see that the wound was now clean. Paige assured him that the girl would almost certainly be cured when the treatment was complete.

What Montgeron saw next finally shattered his resistance and convinced him that he was witnessing something of profound significance. A 16-year-old girl named Gabrielle Moler had arrived, and the interest she excited made Montgeron aware that, even among this crowd of miraculous freaks, she was a celebrity. She removed her cloak and lay on the ground, her skirt modestly round her ankles. Four men, each holding a pointed iron bar, stood over her. When the girl smiled at them, they lunged down at her, driving their rods into her stomach. Montgeron had to be restrained from interfering as the rods went through the girl's dress and into her stomach. He looked for signs of blood staining her dress. But none came, and the girl looked calm and serene. Next the bars were jammed under her chin, forcing her head back. It seemed inevitable that they would penetrate through to her mouth; yet when the points were removed, the flesh was unbroken. The men took up sharp-edged shovels, placed them against a breast, and then pushed with all their might; the girl went on smiling gently. The breast, trapped between shovels, should have been cut off but it seemed impervious to the assault. Then the cutting edge of a shovel was placed against her throat, and the man wielding it did his best to cut off her head; he did not seem to be able even to dent her neck.



Dazed, Montgeron watched as the girl was beaten with a great iron truncheon shaped like a pestle. A stone weighing half a hundredweight (25 kilograms) was raised above her body and dropped repeatedly from a height of several feet. Finally, Montgeron watched her kneel in front of a blazing fire, and plunge her head into it. He could feel the heat from where he stood; yet her hair and eyebrows were not even singed. When she picked up a blazing chunk of coal and proceeded to eat it, Montgeron could stand no more and left.

But he went back repeatedly, until he had enough materials for the first volume of an amazing book. He presented it to the King, Louis XV, who was so shocked and indignant that he had Montgeron thrown into prison. Yet Montgeron felt he had to 'bear witness' and was to publish two more volumes following his release, full of precise scientific testimony concerning the miracles.

The suppression of St Médard

In the year following Montgeron's imprisonment, 1732, the Paris authorities decided that the scandal was becoming unbearable and closed down the churchyard. But the *convulsionnaires* had discovered that they could perform their miracles anywhere, and they continued for many years. A hardened sceptic, the scientist La Condamine, was as startled as Montgeron when, in 1759, he watched a girl named Sister Françoise being crucified on a wooden cross, nailed by the hands and feet over a period of several hours, and stabbed in the side with a spear. He noticed that all this obviously hurt the girl, and her wounds bled when the nails were removed; but she seemed none the worse for an ordeal that would have killed most people.

So what can we say of the miracles from the standpoint of the 20th century? Some writers believe it was a kind of self-hypnosis. But while this could explain the excrement-eater and the woman who sucked festering wounds, it is less plausible in explaining Gabrielle Moler's feats of endurance. These remind us rather of descriptions of ceremonies of dervishes and fakirs: for example, J.G. Bennett in his autobiography *Witness* describes watching a dervish ritual in which a razor-sharp sword was placed across the belly of a naked man, and two heavy men jumped up and down on it – all without even marking the flesh. What seems to be at work here is some power of 'mind over matter', deeper than mere hypnosis, which is not yet understood but merits serious attention.

It would be absurd to stop looking for scientific explanations of the miracles of St Médard. But let us not, in the meantime, deceive ourselves by accepting superficial 'sceptical' explanations.

Ummo -red alert

The extravagant claims made about the alleged landings by spacecraft from the planet Ummo in 1966 and 1967 make the Ummo case one of the most fascinating on record. But, asks HILARY EVANS, was the whole thing no more than an elaborate hoax?

ONE OF THE MOST ALARMING ASPECTS of life on Earth with which the Ummites had to contend, according to them, was the danger of being caught in a nuclear war. But, being the logical creatures that they are, they devised a way of measuring the potential danger of any conflict, and once it reached 28 per cent on their scale they intended to return to Ummo before it might be too late.

However, they contacted the Spanish ufologist Rafael Farriols and explained that they had constructed three hide-outs, one in France, one in Spain and one in Yugoslavia, in case they were suddenly caught in a nuclear war. Each refuge would, apparently, accommodate 100 people – both Ummites and their contacts – for two years, by which time they hoped they could emerge to safety.

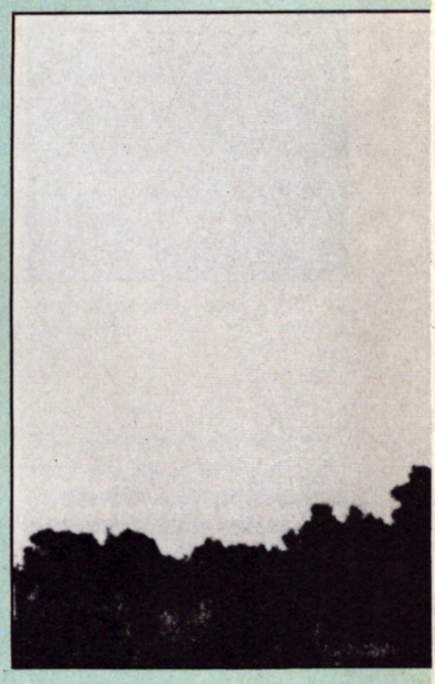
To ensure that they reached these hide-outs before being engulfed in a nuclear fireball, the Ummites claimed that they had placed agents on both American and Russian missile sites who would contact a third agent in Bilbao, Spain, if they suspected their 'side' was about to 'press the button'. The code phrase was 'Aunt Margaret is very ill.' The man in Bilbao would then notify the Ummites and their contacts, each of whom would have already been given a code enabling him to decipher a message describing where he could find a hidden box. Inside the box there would be a sonar device that would guide each person safely to the secret refuge by means of a high-pitched signal.

As soon as Farriols heard about this scheme he got in touch with his fellow ufologist, Antonio Ribera, Spain's best-known UFO researcher, who quickly realised just how absurd the whole story was. It was certainly ingenious, but it was also riddled with illogicalities. For one thing, it would be virtually impossible for an Ummo agent inside an American or Russian missile base to have time, or even be allowed, to telephone someone in Bilbao about his aunt's health. In any case, the plan excluded the possibility that a nuclear war might be started by a country other than America or Russia.

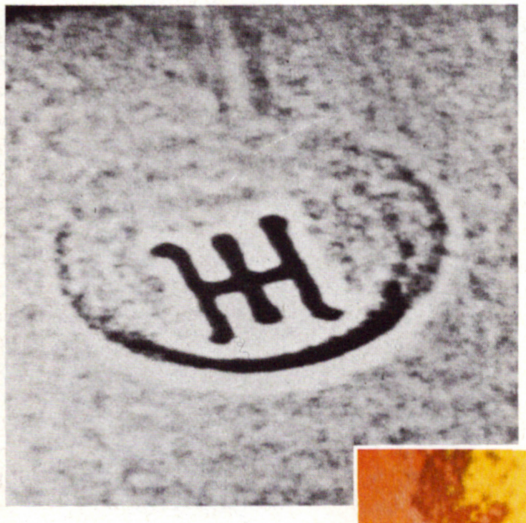
Ribera was also sceptical about the sonar device, for even if it could guide people through diversions and traffic jams, the whole journey could still take so long that those looking for their hide-outs might be caught in a nuclear explosion.

As far as many are concerned, the most unconvincing aspect of the case concerns the photographs taken of the UFOs at Aluche and San José. The Spanish ufologist Oscar del Brear challenged the authenticity of the pictures of the UFO above San José, pointing out a number of inconsistencies. He noted, for example, that all the reports of the sighting referred to a number of witnesses in the grounds of a nearby country house. Why, then, did not they appear in the photographs?

The American UFO research group Ground Saucer Watch (GSW) analysed the photographs with a computer and came to a conclusion very similar to that of the French



Below: a scene from the Arab-Israeli war of 1973. According to the Ummites, one of the major risks of their existence on Earth was the danger of nuclear war. They regarded the Yom Kippur War as a particular threat. They had, however, devised a way of evaluating the potential danger of any armed conflict – and intended to return to Ummo once it exceeded 28 per cent on their scale



One of the eye-witnesses' photographs of the alleged Ummo landing in the Madrid suburb of San José de Valderas on 1 June 1967 (top), and the results of computer analyses by Ground Saucer Watch of the United States. Profiling (above), filtering (above right) and colour contouring (right) reveal that the UFO was, in all probability, not quite what the Ummites claimed it to be: the object, according to GSW, is 'extremely close' to the camera, and is probably no more than 8 inches (20 centimetres) in diameter – possibly a paper or plastic plate – suspended by a transparent thread, with the Ummo markings applied with ink. The supporting thread is particularly evident in the filtered shot

ufologist Claude Poher. He argued that the San José photographs were fakes and that they could well have been made using a plastic plate, with lettering in ink, probably suspended from a fishing line.

GSW determined that the object was 'extremely close' to the camera, and was probably an article such as a paper plate, less than 8 inches (20 centimetres) in diameter. Most damning of all, edge enhancement suggested that the 'saucer' or plate was suspended by a very thin piece of thread. They concluded, as Poher had done, that the photographs showed a paper or plastic plate – with the Ummo markings applied with ink – suspended from transparent thread at a short distance from a camera positioned close to the ground.

The photographs had been taken at the site of the alleged UFO sightings, and in similar weather conditions to those on 1 June 1967 at San José. Presumably, however, they had been taken before that date so that journalist San Antonio (see page 2664) could collect them from a photographic laboratory in the belief that they had been taken the previous evening.

However, Ribera and Farriols thought that the photographs were genuine. This could have been because so many witnesses said that they had seen a UFO. Yet many of the eye-witness accounts appear to be anonymous, and it seems that the only person to have carried out any research into this aspect of the case is José Luis Jordan, who was one of the main witnesses of the UFO at Aluche. Could he be the mastermind, as some have suggested, behind Ummo?

Those who believe that he is argue that their suspicion is supported by the fact that two other Spanish researchers, Zalbidea and Lizar, reported that there had in fact been only one witness to the Aluche sighting who reported seeing any markings – that person was Jordan, and he already knew about Ummo and the Ummites' special mark.

An anonymous investigator, quoted by Ribera and Farriols, claimed to have met several witnesses to the San José sighting – again, all anonymous – who saw the UFO but insist that it was in sight for only about two and a half minutes, instead of the 12 more generally claimed, and that it *bore no markings*.

In other words, there could have been a UFO sighting at Aluche in February 1966 and another in June 1967, but the markings could have been invented by Jordan or someone else to give credibility to the Ummo story.

Ribera and Farriols, who knew Jordan personally and referred to him as 'our friend' in their book *Un caso perfecto*, do not seem to have regarded him as the mastermind behind the case. Some suggest that they were being over-credulous, others that they did not look into the case sufficiently thoroughly.

Why, for example, was the matter of the typist and the 'Danish doctors' never pursued (see page 2686)? When the typist wrote to all those on the Ummite mailing list suggesting a meeting, he must have given his name and address or some other means of making contact.

Another obvious step would have been to tape-record the telephone conversations with the alleged Ummites. Voice analysis would have been revealing, establishing whether the speaker was a native Spaniard. No doubt many of the recipients of the Ummo scripts, believing firmly in their authenticity, would have been reluctant to co-operate in any such investigation: but the engineer Enrique Villagrassa Novoa, who

These pictures (above and right) were allegedly taken by a witness named Viita at Odense, Denmark, on 15 December 1974. One of them shows five dots on the disc's underside – while the other shows markings similar to those allegedly seen at the landings at Aluche and San José de Valderas. Is the picture with the 'Ummo' markings a fake – has someone retouched the photograph in an attempt to establish a link with Ummo?

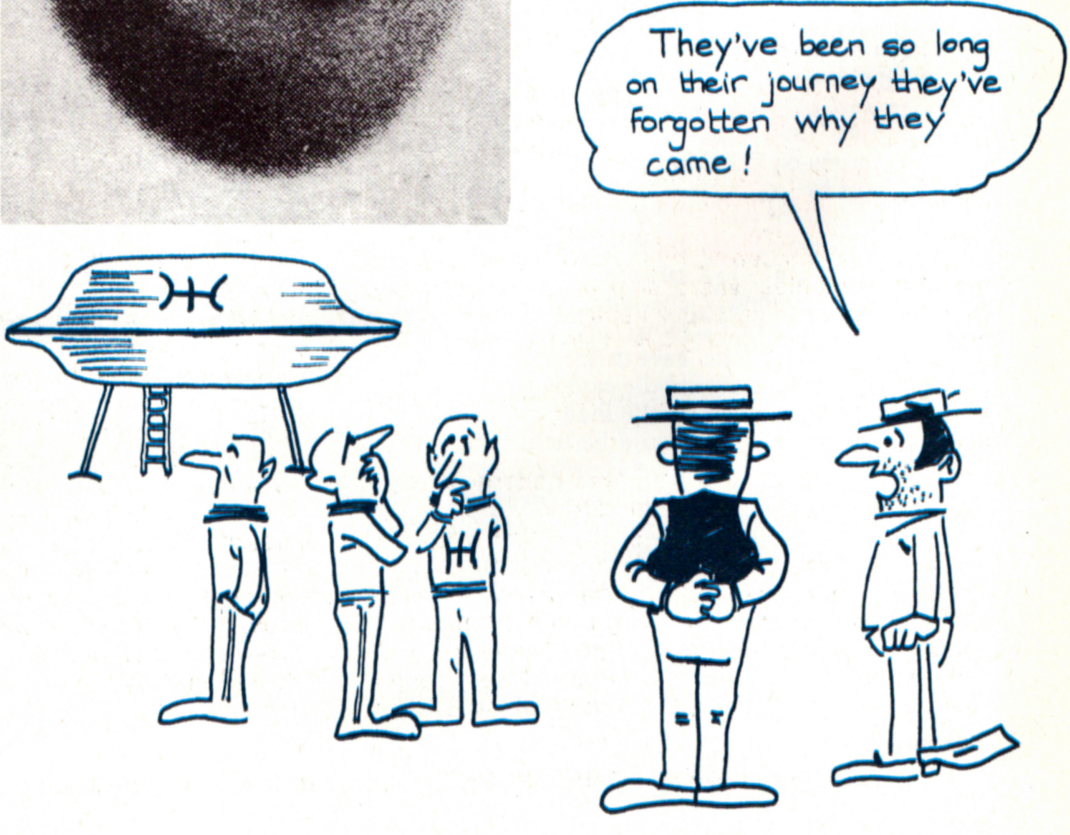
willingly told Ribera that he had been contacted by the Ummites, could surely have helped in the search for the elusive typist.

Ribera and Farriols describe how they attempted to trace the San José photographers, but without success. Yet it is known that the first set of photographs was left at a photographic laboratory for San Antonio to collect: why did not anyone approach the laboratory to find out who had left the pictures there, whether the laboratory had printed the photographs and, if so, on what date? Any scrap of information might have been crucial.

In short, the investigation into this so-called 'perfect case' was less thorough than might have been expected. Indeed, some cynics suggest that this is proof of a cover up.

If the Ummo affair was a hoax, then it presumably involved a lot of organisation. It is claimed that the Ummites wrote approximately 6700 letters. There are also the complex treatises on Ummite philosophy and science, the detailed account of their space vessels and the apparent emergency procedure in the event of a nuclear war that had to be worked at. Some people think that the scale of this operation must have been, beyond the scope of a private individual and that a government department must have been involved. However, there is not a scrap of evidence to support this idea, and others find the whole business so amateurish that they think only a group of university students could be responsible.

But the sceptics still have one point to answer. Who could have known that a UFO would appear on 1 June 1967 at 8.20 pm above Aluche, as predicted in the Spanish newspaper *Informaciones*?



Right: a cartoon by Antonio Moya Cerpa, reproduced in Antonio Ribera's *El misterio de Ummo* ('The Ummo mystery'). Perhaps it provides a hint as to just how seriously the Ummo case should be taken

Post script

Your letters to THE UNEXPLAINED

Dear Sir,
A few years ago I visited a small restaurant to arrange an anniversary celebration dinner for my wife, myself and some close friends. I spoke to the manager, a small polite Scotsman, who assured me that everything would be in order for the occasion.

Later that night I dreamed that I was once again in the restaurant talking to the manager, when the chef – dressed in whites, including a tall white hat – rushed in and grabbed the manager by the throat; they both fell to the floor wrestling. The dream then faded.

A week later our party went to the restaurant and had a thoroughly enjoyable meal. Just before leaving, I stood at the bar chatting to the manager, expressing my satisfaction at the meal and the service.

I paid the bill and asked if it would be in order to reward the chef, who had attended to us personally during the meal, and passed two pound notes to the manager. He replied that he felt the chef would be more than satisfied at the words of praise for his cooking and service. Suddenly the chef rushed from the kitchen and made a grab at the notes saying: 'I'll take the money, you can take the praise.'

The manager held the notes tantalisingly out of his reach and, while our party watched in fascination, they struggled silently. The chef grabbed the manager around the throat and they both fell to the floor, at which everyone burst out laughing.

Another precognitive dream I had concerned the Falklands crisis. During the run up to the conflict I, along with everyone else, avidly followed the build-up of the invasion force. But after a couple of weeks I became fed up with the whole affair and stopped buying a daily paper for the simple reason that no other news seemed to be reported.

About a week before the actual invasion I awoke one morning deeply puzzled by a dream I'd had. I could not for the life of me explain why I had received such a vivid picture of a newspaper headline reading 'HMS *Sheffield* Sunk'.

I thought that the dream might have come from a childhood memory; I remember reading some newspapers during the Second World War, but I was only a boy at the time. It's odd the tricks your memory plays sometimes, I thought to myself. Finally, the task force reached its destination, and the battle began. At this point I recommenced buying a daily paper. Among the first casualties was a ship of the Royal Navy. Opening my morning paper I stared at the headline that screamed from the page: 'HMS *Sheffield* Sunk'.
Yours faithfully,
Ken Wintle West Bromwich, West Midlands

Dear Sir,
I found your series on the Enfield poltergeist most interesting, particularly Anita Gregory's article in issue 123. It is reassuring to know that some researchers do not become overwhelmed during their investigations of unexplained phenomena. Unfortunately, many do, taking for granted accounts of anomalous events that appear unexplained but, with a little common sense and proper investigation, could be found to have an 'ordinary' explanation.

In the field of ufology, for example, *evidence* is extremely difficult to find, and researchers therefore have to rely heavily on the integrity of the person reporting a sighting. The Plymouth UFO investigation Centre (PUFOIC), of which I am chairman, has a recent case that highlights the need for cautious and careful investigation.

In September 1982 a member of the centre read in a UFO magazine about a close encounter of the fourth kind that occurred in South Devon in April 1981. The magazine gave the centre the address of the witness, whom I shall call 'T. H.', and we arranged that he should spend a week with us towards the end of September. During this time we visited the area of the UFO sighting and interviewed the witness at length. He seemed a very nervous person, but appeared to be reporting a genuine experience.

We corresponded with T. H. between September and December, and he agreed to return to Plymouth to undergo regressive hypnosis, as he claimed a time lapse or memory loss during his encounter. On 3 January T. H. arrived at PUFOIC; he still appeared to be nervous, but was quite insistent about his encounter and repeatedly tried to convince us of the presence of humanoid shapes on some photographs he had taken at the scene of the UFO sighting. However, we could not see these, and told him so.

On 4 January, we spent the day going over the encounter with T. H., combing through the details carefully. Afterwards we noticed several important differences from his original account, and further questioning revealed that T. H. had fabricated the whole affair. It turned out that he was obsessed by the UFO phenomenon; just before his alleged encounter in April 1981, he had spent six weeks working in Warminster, during which time he had befriended a well-known ufologist. T. H. admitted that he had made up the story, basing it on accounts in several UFO paperbacks.

We are compiling a summary of the T. H. case, which should be of interest to ufologists and perhaps to investigators of unexplained phenomena of all kinds. Anyone wishing to obtain a copy of the report should send a stamped, addressed envelope to PUFOIC, 17 Wilkinson Road, St Budeaux, Plymouth, Devon PL5 1DF.
Yours faithfully,
Eric Morris Plymouth

Dear Sir,
In 1979 I went to Vancouver in Canada, and my uncle took me to a rather unusual but fascinating place. He parked his huge station wagon on a bumpy road with a steep gradient, and then took the key out of the ignition and released the handbrake. There were eight of us in the car but, to my astonishment, it nevertheless began to move – *uphill*.

My uncle then poured some water from a nearby stream onto the surface of the road and this began to flow uphill. He then asked me to walk up the slope. Although it was a lovely, calm afternoon, with no breeze, I felt a force pushing my body. It was an experience I shall never forget.
Yours faithfully,
Jasleen Gill Derby

Send *your* letters to THE UNEXPLAINED, Orbis House, 20–22 Bedfordbury, London WC2N 4BT

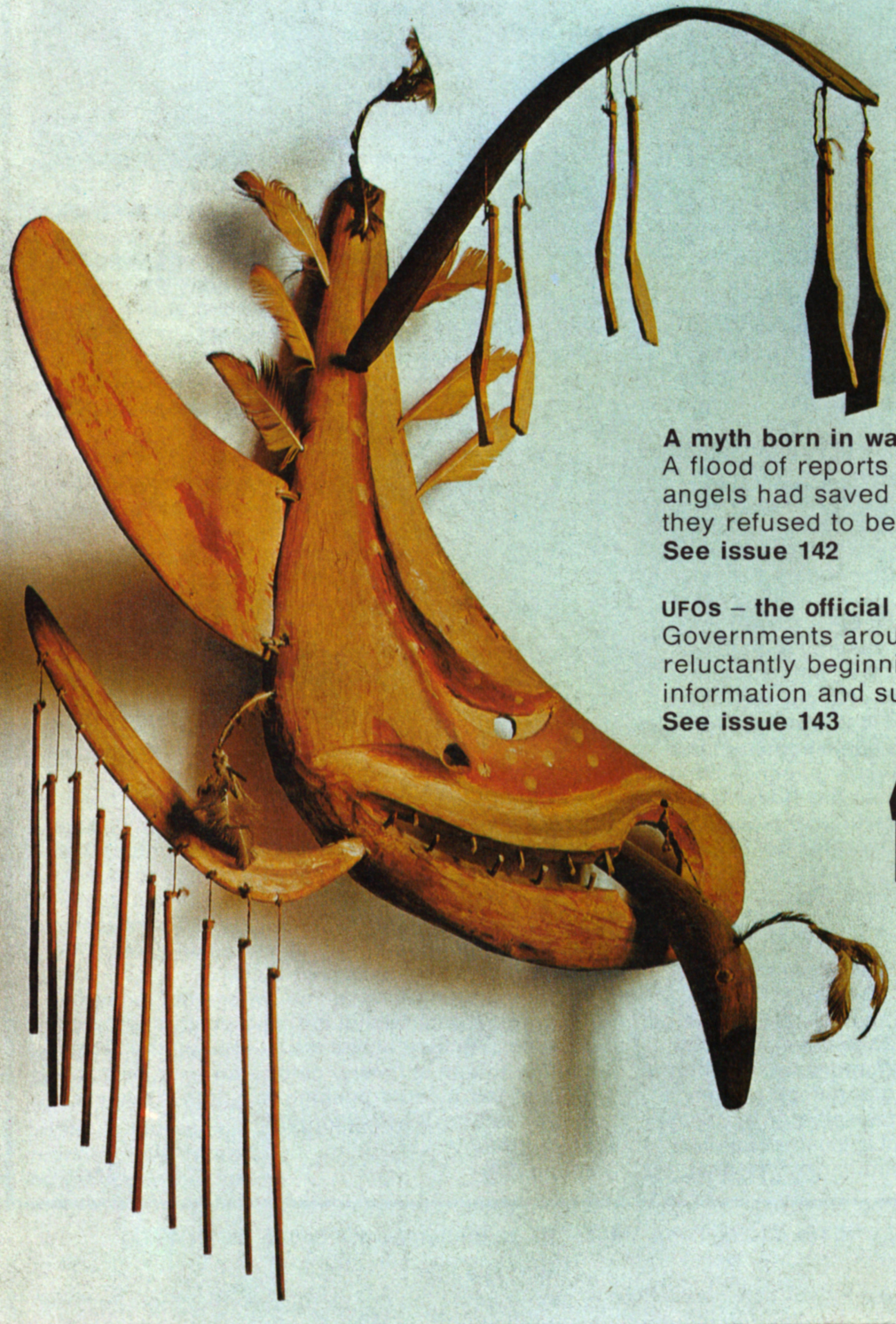
A few of the revealing new series that are starting soon in *The Unexplained*

In contact with the gods
At the heart of primitive communities around the world is the figure of the shaman, at once priest, healer and magician. We trace the long ordeal of initiation that brings him into communion with the gods in **issue 138**

Skeletons in the cupboard
The reconstruction of Man's family tree is vaunted as the supreme achievement of evolutionary theory. But how much of this supposed history is fact and how much fancy? **See issue 139**

The Christian Sadhu
The wandering holy man, or sadhu, is a common sight in India – but Sundar Singh was an exceptional one, for he preached Christianity. His life was seemingly filled with miracles, and many regard him as a modern saint. **See issue 140**

Accident or design?
If it were not for a string of fortunate 'coincidences' the Universe would be a lot less hospitable to life – in fact, it seems 'fine-tuned' to permit our existence. Is it really just good luck, or can a scientific explanation be found? Or is it the greatest miracle of them all? **See issue 141**



A mask worn by an Eskimo shaman of the late 19th century. Carved from wood and embellished with feathers, it represents a spirit helper guiding a school of whales towards waiting hunters

A myth born in war
A flood of reports told the British public that angels had saved their forces at Mons – and they refused to be disillusioned.
See issue 142

UFOs – the official view
Governments around the world are reluctantly beginning to divulge their information and suspicions about UFOs.
See issue 143

Miracles never cease...